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ABSTRACT

In first year college composition classes, teachers often encounter "writing-resisters"--students who enact their disrespect, students who feel they are better off flirting, students who refuse to turn in papers. In addition, there are students for whom writing seems irrelevant. Teachers can articulate to students verbally and in syllabi, policies, and assignments reasons for asking them to write, and the expectations for their writing which those reasons facilitate. The included syllabus for "Strategies in Writing," a class first taught at Grand Valley State University and later at Bowling Green State University and Owens Community College, shows a cultural studies approach as a means of challenging students to think and write beyond their life experiences to date and to begin to acquire social and academic skills they will need in global and diverse workplaces, with colleagues of "wildly different" races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. Through this class, students are encouraged to interrogate and transform their own educations. The structure of this class diffused resistance, and the students performed above professors' high standards. (Contains the syllabus.) (PM)

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ED 465 193

# Breaking Down the Playground Gates: A Cultural Studies Composition Course on the World of W rk

Presented to the Michigan College Education Association Conference

October 20, 2000

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CS 511 222

I bring you greetings from the Chapman Learning Community, a residential living/learning community at Bowling Green State University. And I am here today to offer you what Laura Rendon of Arizona State University calls "bringing my heart, my teaching heart." You honor me with your presence. Dr. Rendon, at the Washington Center's National Conference on Learning Communities, held in May 1998 in Seattle, spoke the understanding born of years of teaching college students, many of whom are marginalized by their ethnicity, or race, or gender, or class, or sexual orientation, as perhaps many of you have been or are. She spoke of the pressing need for us to bring our hearts into our classrooms, and for us to invite students also to bring their hearts, to valorize those hearts and minds.

You, courageous teachers of writing all, would not be here today if you did not have great hearts. During my high school student teaching experience at Central High School in Grand Rapids, MI, a veteran government teacher said to me, "Teaching is a great profession if it doesn't kill you." One of the reasons why we lose our teaching hearts is what we call in our field "student resistance." This is not news to you.

As I speak, you (and I) are thinking of those students who have manifested their resistance in our composition classes, taking different forms. I think of a current student, a young man, who is constantly asking

questions I've answered several different ways, who eternally has his hand in the air, who follows me around the classroom, who dogs my office hours, who is SO needy. He is enacting his resistance. He is limiting his ability to listen, to create new knowledge for himself, to make social connections with his peers, and to progress in his college-level writing strategies.

And there are other "writing-resisters"—students who enact their disrespect, students who feel they are better off flirting, students who refuse to turn in papers (or to turn them in on time). There are students for whom writing seems truly irrelevant, and those for whom the terrible experiences in their past or in their present make first-year composition truly irrelevant. Some students are downright dangerous in their resistance, threatening us with their words, perhaps with weapons, and most damaging of all, with their silence.

Bringing heart into our classrooms in very practical and viable ways makes it possible for us to "break down the playground gates" of the academy and of the various resistances students bring to the first—year composition classrooms. What does it mean to bring our teaching hearts to first-year composition students, to break down those gates?

We can resist our own resistance. We can acknowledge to trusted colleagues the actions of students w[illegible]rage, aggravate, and frustrate our

attempts to teach them, which disturb our dreams. We can articulate to students verbally and in our syllabi, policies, and assignments our reasons for asking them to write, and the expectations for their writing which those reasons facilitate.

We can ask our students to articulate their reasons for writing, and turn those reasons into assignments which both answer students' interests and also the constraints and stated outcomes of our first-year composition programs. [Hand out syllabi for the world of work/cultural studies course]. This course, born of a collaborative friendship between Catherine Cameron-Heldt, a Career Services Director at Grand Valley State University then, and I, at the time, a writing instructor there.

We worked together to match expressed student reasons for writing—success in future careers, workplace writing—to the required departmental outcomes of the GVSU composition program (later I did this alone at BGSU and also at Owens Community College, having less access to Career Services personnel resources).

[Outline the bulleted points on the rationale briefly]

I chose a cultural studies approach as a means of challenging students to think and write beyond their life experiences to date, and, in this preliminary way, to begin to acquire the social and academic skills they will

need in global and diverse workplaces, with colleagues of wildly different races, ethnicities, classes, and sexual orientations. Catherine devised ways in which our students could meet professionals in the students' proposed careers—job shadowing, professional interviews—and build resumes which reflected both their diversity as individuals and those of future employers. Together, we hoped that such an underpinning might be more inclusive of all students than one that ignores the diversity of the workplace, their colleagues and their peers.

Harriet Malinowitz, in her essay "A Feminist Critique of Writing Across the Disciplines," (Jarratt and Worsham, 1997), challenges us to develop a composition pedagogy which has, as a foundational concept, "students critically assess[ing] how forms of knowledge and method are hierarchically structured in the disciplines [and by, my extrapolation, the world of work] so that some achieve canonical or hegemonic status whereas others are effectively fenced out" (293). She challenges us to teach students to interrogate and to transform their own educations.

In a composition course designed to listen to students' hearts—their desires for their future careers and lives—possibilities are presented for engaging student investment in their own projects. In Catherine's and my composition course, students performed completely above our already high

expectations. As they developed their resumes and interviewed professionals in their proposed career fields, as wrote essays on ethical, moral, and social issues in those professions, they ventured down academic paths considered beyond their "first-year" abilities. They thought about their lives, and what they wanted for their own emerging selves, both personally and professionally. They investigated professions and found themselves ill-suited to them, in some cases. So they changed the course of their inquiries and changed majors. Others discovered themselves happily fitted to their proposed careers. Eight people received job offers, and one young man won an internship at a four-star hotel.

In the end, we—students and teachers—are able together to side-step and defuse resistance. We are able to listen to each others' hearts.

ENG150
STRATEGIES IN WRITING
(T) HARS200 (Th) HARS Computer Lab
8-9:50 am

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*(This course was originally presented at Grand Valley State University in 1997 and has since taken similar forms at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH and at Owens Community College in Findlay, OH. 1997-2000).*

1/7 (T) –Introductions, webs, policies, diagnostic essay
1/9 (Th) – Topic webs, brainstorming in "field" groups

1/14 (T)—Individual research topic questions and webs DUE; collaborative work: developing some "working questions" for further research
1/16 (Th) – Internet/search engine surfing for scholarly sources; Cynthia's song and dance on research-locating strategies; skim "A Writer's Choices" (1-6) and "Everyday Sources for 15 Subjects" (just find your major in this part—yellow pages) in Lunsford/Connors, Easy Writer: A Pocket Guide)

1/21 (T) – Cynthia's song and dance on research/documentation for sciences field group; skim "CBE Style" (189-198); working groups discussion: "Locating the Power Sources"—develop questions for finding out where power resides in your proposed career, and present these to class. BRING IN posted policies from your job, or from your parents' or friends' jobs to use as starters in your groups. 1/23 (Th) – Lab writing: using questions generated in your groups, search for professional articles in your proposed field. What sorts of **covert** information can you generate about your field?

1/28 (T) – Cynthia's song and dance on research/documentation for social sciences field group; skim "APA Style" (157-172); working groups discussion: "It's that Woman/Man Thing: Looking for Gender in All the Wrong Places"—develop questions for finding out gender constructions, biases, frameworks in your proposed career, and present these to class. BRING IN a mental list of how you see managers treating employees, how you see employees treat each other, how employees treat customers, how customers treat employees.
1/30 (Th) – Lab writing: using questions generated in your groups, reread the professional articles you've located on your research question. What sorts of attitudes, biases, **covert or overt** information can you generate about your field, based on these articles?

2/4 (T) – Cynthia's song and dance on research/documentation for humanities field group; skim "MLA Style" (136-156); working groups discussion: "Political Correctness, It's Not: Issues of Diversity in the World of Work"—develop questions for discovering ways in which sexual orientation, race, religion are impacted by and impact your career field, and present to class. BRING IN an example from a current newspaper or news magazine.

2/6 (Th) – Mini-talk on organizational strategies for analysis of issues of power, gender, race, and sexual orientation in your field, to complete first section of your research project. Director of Career Services visits class: information on conducting interviews and resume writing in computer lab; complete forms for professional interview matching.

2/11 (T) – Cynthia's little, tiny song and dance on human/ethical issues and practical applications in research. Working groups discussion: generate questions which address the ethical and human issues of your proposed career fields and present to class.

2/13 (Th) – Resumes DUE at the beginning of class. Lab writing: Continue work on analysis of power, race, class, and sexual orientation issues with regard to career fields, and disciplinary "gate-keeping". Student-teacher consults, student-student peer comments/suggestions.

2/18 (T) – Field trip to Career Center on campus—"Career Library Director Shows All (His Sources for Finding That Cool Job)"—locate (and write down) at least five sources here for further reference on your proposed career, and five new things you're glad to know☺ (not about that good-looking man/woman/classmate, silly—five new things about your field).

2/20 (Th) – Analysis DUE at the end of the lab period (this is section 1 of your paper, folks, so just think of this as one thing less you have to do at the end). Critiques of resumes by Career Services Director will be returned.

2/25 (T) – Working groups discussion: BRING IN all your scholarly articles addressing your research question. Within your groups, present an oral rationale for your use of each source (In other words: how does it address what you really want to know?).

2/27 (Th) – Annotated bibliography DUE at the end of class: Short summary of each source you plan to use in your research essay, accompanying complete bibliographic information in the documentation style for your field. Teacher-student consults. (You are starting construction of part 2 of your research essay here—don't whine). Complete revisions to resume and hand carry to Career Services for inclusion in their online service.

¾ (T) and 3/6 (Th) –SPRING BREAK! SURF, SUN AND WINTER FUN!

3/11 (T) – No, nothing's due—do you think I fell off the turnip truck yesterday? It was just spring break, for gosh sakes! Cynthia's song and dance on professional

interviews, interviewing, questions, and evaluating results as part of research. In working groups today: formulate list of question you will ask your professional contact.

3/13 (Th) – In class today, start work on literature review for your research essay (this is part 2). Teacher/student individual consults.

3/18 (T) – BRING QUESTIONS about your own research to your working groups today—snags, problems, unresolved issues, blank spots in the research, dead ends. Brainstorm ways you can help each other resolve the issues. I'm here too.

3/20 (Th) – Literature review DUE at the end of class today (You've got part 2 done—now, aren't you proud?)

3/25 (T) – BRING solutions you are finding to the problem you posed for research to your working groups today. Present each author's contribution (or lack thereof) to the solution. What do the authors leave out, what do they SAY they are leaving out vs. what they just don't mention, but leave out anyway? How are these solutions informed (or challenged) by questions you've generated about race, gender, class, sexual orientation? (Yes, you're constructing part 3 of your research essay; so jump in there and blat it out today, folks).

3/27 (Th) – Begin writing "Solutions" section of your research essay (you might think about the "problem" of calling this section "Solutions" as part of your writing). How is your view of solutions to your research question informed by the questions you've generated about race, gender, class, and sexual orientation?

4/1 (T) – Informational interviews precis DUE. Talk with your working group today about your interview—what did you learn? How did the interview clarify, complicate, (maybe disintegrate) your view of your proposed career field?

4/3 (Th) – "Solutions" section DUE (This is part 3 of your research essay—you're almost there, folks)

4/1 (T) – Present your "Future Recommendations/Possibilities for Research" section to your working groups today. (Yes, this is section four, the last section, the big blowout, so don't blow it.) Tell us what you know (and don't know), what you thought you knew, and now what you REALLY know, what the scholars with the fancy degrees might still need to look into, what YOU will look into, given half a chance. (And, no, this is NOT "April Fool's").

4/3 (Th) – "Future Recommendations/Possibilities for Research" section DUE today at the end of class, along with your "Works Cited" and Title pages. (Hey, guess what? You're done.) Teacher/student consults.

4/8 (T) – Research essay drafts DUE at the beginning of class, complete with Title and Works Cited pages, all earlier drafts, webs, informational interview reports, yada, yada. Pass them around those working groups, use all those good peer questioning strategies we've been developing all semester, make helpful suggestions. Teacher/student consults.

4/10 (Th) – Research essays DUE—final copies, along with all earlier drafts and STUFF (see 4/8).

4/15 (T) – Individual consults on portfolios. Portfolio must include research essay, professional resume, one in-class writing, and informational interview report.

4/17 (Th)—FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE. Last day of regular class (now go find a summer job—"Ya got that fancy resume now, kid.")

ENGLISH 150
STRATEGIES IN WRITING
Office hours: TTh (12-1), W (9-1)

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REQUIRED MATERIALS

Lunsford, Andrea and Robert Connors. Easy Writer: A Pocket Guide. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
A preformatted 3.5" computer disk
Photocopying of 8-10 periodical articles
A small, inexpensive academic calendar/organizer
Resume Expert disk (purchase at Career Services) [Now Web WalkUp at BGSU, and a similar web-based resume program at GVSU]

OBJECTIVES

English 150 is designed to provide you with the tools necessary for success in the variety of written assignments you will encounter at Bowling Green State University. You will be working individually with me, and in cooperation with your classmates, fine-tuning your writing, interacting critically with academic writing, developing college-level research skills, and acquiring questioning strategies which will connect and transfer to future life and career choices.

POLICIES

You will be expected to learn and to use the computers in the Harshman-Chapman Computer Lab for our writing purposes. Final drafts must be double-spaced and word-processed in clear, dark, legible type, and accompanied by all earlier webs, drafts, peer comments, and revisions.

Attendance is required; if you miss more than two classes, you will not be eligible to submit a final portfolio. All late assignments will be designated so in my grade book and will lower the final grade. Exceptions will be made only in consultation with me **prior** to a specific deadline.

ASSIGNMENTS

As a means to acquiring university-level competency in writing and research, you will be producing a 7-10 page focused research essay in an academic discipline, using the appropriate documentation style for that discipline. You will complete this essay in sections, focusing on a question which relates to your proposed career choice.

GRADING

The intensive writing practice, collaboration with peers, and individual coaching with me, which you will experience in this class, usually result in dramatically improved writing skills by the end of the semester. It makes more sense, then, for you to receive helpful feedback throughout the semester, and revise your writing to a polished form. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to submit a portfolio of your own writing.

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENTS

I will ask you to submit a final portfolio, which must include your research essay, your professional resume, and your report of the professional interview. The last piece included must be one of the cultural critiques written in class. I will use the departmental holistic grading assessment, which I handed to you at the beginning of the semester, as the basis for determining your final grade.

HELP...
is available. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask, either during class or during my office hours. You may leave a message on my voice mail (2-0519) or drop me a line (mahaffc@bgnet.bgsu.edu) and I will return your call or message as soon as possible. The Writing Lab is also aware of our assignments and is willing to assign someone to talk with you about your writing (303 Moseley, 372-1234)